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Review article

MICHAEL B. AHLAND, *Language Death in Mesmes: A Sociolinguistic and Historical-comparative Examination of a Disappearing Ethiopian-Semitic Language*

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Book summary

The linguistic situation in Ethiopia with more than 70 languages belonging to several branches of the Afroasiatic and the Nilo-Saharan phyla has drawn the attention of many linguists from various sub-disciplines. The present publication is different from most previous linguistic works on Ethiopian languages through its focus on the recently extinct Ethiosemitic language Mäsmäs and the reconstruction of social, historical and linguistic factors that caused its death. Ahland was able to record a short text in Mäsmäs with its terminal speaker in 2001, which he later analysed through language comparison.

The present publication is an edition of Ahland's M.A. thesis prepared for the University of Texas at Arlington in 2004. It documents almost all linguistic traces of Mäsmäs and the findings of an intelligibility test among Gunnän Gurage varieties, which Ahland conducted with his wife Colleen and Hussein Mohammed during April to November 2001. Based on these findings, Ahland proposes a new classification of Gunnän Gurage varieties.

The general structure of the publication consists of six major chapters, each dealing with specific aspects of the linguistic description of Mäsmäs. The last part of the publication contains five appendices: two 99-item word-lists in which Mäsmäs is compared with the Peripheral Western Gurage languages (PWG) Ənnämor, Əndägäñ and Geto, and the Cushitic languages Hadiyya and Kambaata (pp. 91–108); an original Mäsmäs text and notes on its analysis (pp. 109–134); and a map of the Gurage area with principal varieties and their grouping into communication centres (p. 135).

The book opens with an introductory chapter (pp. 1–16) containing background information about Mäsmäs and Gunnän Gurage. After an overview of the classification of Gunnän Gurage varieties and a brief introduction into the Semitic homeland debate, Ahland reviews the available literature on Mäsmäs. Furthermore, he presents the results of the intelligibility test among selected Gurage varieties based on which he proposes four communication centres, namely (1) Kəstane (including Kəstane and Dobbi), (2) Mäsqañ, (3) *Säbat bet* Gurage (with Desa, Aklil, Muḥər, Əža, Čaha, Gumär, Gura and Geto), and (4) Inor (with Ənnämor, Enär and Əndägäñ).

In chapter two "Establishing the Socio-Historical Context" (pp. 17–26), Ahland deals with the sociolinguistic and historical circumstances responsible for

language death in Mäsmäs. Given the linguistic convergence between Gurage and Highland East Cushitic varieties, Ahland assumes long-term linguistic contacts between speakers of PWG varieties and Hadiyya. Nowadays the descendants of the Mäsmäs live in an enclave surrounded by Hadiyya speakers. With the exception of a single terminal speaker who was in his eighties in 2001, none of them speaks or understands Mäsmäs but all have shifted to Hadiyya. A sociolinguistic interview with the terminal speaker and the analysis of other available sociolinguistic information about Mäsmäs disclosed three social factors which caused the language shift from Mäsmäs to Hadiyya, namely, (a) isolation of the Mäsmäs speakers from the PWG speaking community, (b) economic reasons which forced the Mäsmäs traders to use Hadiyya for their transactions at the market, and (c) the low prestige of Mäsmäs as compared to Hadiyya.

The third chapter “The Implications of Language Death” (pp. 27–42), is concerned with the reliability of the linguistic data provided by the terminal speaker who has not used the language actively for thirty years. After a concise presentation of various language shift/death scenarios and their linguistic implications, Ahland favours the model of a “rusty speaker”, i. e., an individual who acquired a first language in a natural context but then lost competency due to lack of regular communication. Ahland argues that the speech of the terminal Mäsmäs speaker is a reliable source. The lexical items provided by him are found not to be significantly different from the data collected by Bender and Stinson in 1969 and the recorded text has a morphological structure which is similar to other PWG varieties. Furthermore, Āndägāñ speakers who have never heard Mäsmäs understood 78 % of the text and considered Mäsmäs to be a kind of “Old Āndägāñ”. Nevertheless, Ahland depicted a number of irregularities in the text which probably occurred due to language obsolescence, such as the optional use of the Amharic past-tense auxiliary verb *nebbē* instead of the PWG past-tense auxiliary verb *banē*, the loss of contrast in marking 1S and 3SM subjects on imperfective verbs, etc.

Having assured the reliability of the Mäsmäs data, Ahland establishes its genetic affiliation in chapter four “The Genetic Position of Mesmes” (pp. 43–72). Although Hetzron (1977: 4) postulated a close relationship between Āndägāñ and Mäsmäs, he did not substantiate his claim with actual data. Ahland, in contrast, presents detailed data used for the genetic classification of Mäsmäs. He even includes the ethnonym *Mäsmäs* ‘people’, actually pronounced *mismis*, which could be the reduplicated form of the Gurage noun *mis(s)* ‘man’ (pp. 43f.). Ahland considers the ethnonym an extra-linguistic indicator for Mäsmäs being a Gurage variety because only Gurage would identify themselves with such a name. With regard to the linguistic evidence, Ahland shows that Mäsmäs is a PWG variety by comparing various morphosyntactic and lexi-

cal features, such as the retention of the so-called “main verb marker” *-d* on the past-tense auxiliary verb *banɛ-d* but nowhere else, as is exactly the case in PWG varieties, or lexical items, such as the verb *kɛʃʃɛ* ‘want’ or the adverb *waʔaka* ‘now’ which are said to occur only in PWG varieties. Given the general relatedness between Mäsmäs and PWG varieties, Ahland proceeds to establish the exact genetic relationship of the involved varieties to each other based on shared innovations mainly manifested in regular sound changes.

Unique linguistic features in Mäsmäs that probably occur due to language contact with Hadiyya are described in chapter five “Evidence of Contact-induced Change in the Mesmes Data” (pp. 73–84). Only a few loanwords from Hadiyya and Amharic can be detected in the Mäsmäs data, like *ta:je* ‘fly’ < Kambaata *tawi*, *fɔre* ‘liver’ < Hadiyya *afere*, or *ha:ɣɔ:* ‘see’ < Amharic *aj:ɛ*. However, structural changes, such as the loss of gender distinction with plural pronouns, the addition of final vowels to lexical items which originally ended in a consonant, the lax pronunciation of vowels in closed syllables and the metathesis of the glottal stop in sonorant-glottal stop sequences, as in Mäsmäs *baʔmɔ:* vs. Geto *bɛnʔa* ‘eat’ (p. 71), are considered to be interferences with Hadiyya. As the unpublished grammatical field notes collected by Bender and Stinson contain bound possessive pronouns in Mäsmäs that precede the head noun Ahland even assumes a syntactic change in Mäsmäs due to Hadiyya contact.

Finally, the generalizations drawn from the main findings of the preceding sections are presented in chapter six “Conclusion” (pp. 85–90). Ahland first presents his new classification of PWG and Gunnän Gurage varieties. This classification is based on chronological sound changes characteristic for certain subgroups. Hetzron’s (1972) “Central Western Gurage” and “Peripheral Western Gurage” now appear as “*Säbat bet* Gurage” and “Inor/Geto”, respectively. The *Säbat bet* Gurage varieties are separated from Kəstane and Məsqan by the sound changes *l > r* and *r > n*. Inor/Geto can be distinguished from *Säbat bet* Gurage by devoicing and degemination of the geminate plosives *dd > t* and *bb > p*. Based on further sound changes, Geto is separated from Inor, which, in turn, is subdivided into Ənnämor vs. South Inor, the latter splits into Əndägäñ and Mäsmäs. The sub-classification of the Inor group is confirmed by the scores of the intelligibility test mentioned in chapter 1, which is 78 % for Mäsmäs and Əndägäñ (p. 4) but 68 % for Mäsmäs and Ənnämor (p. 14). Secondly, Ahland concludes that the genetic classification of Mäsmäs was only possible through a holistic approach in which all possible linguistic and extra-linguistic factors were considered for the disclosure of language change phenomena. The close relationship between Mäsmäs and Əndägäñ becomes obvious when contact-induced language change in Mäsmäs is considered. This also provides an explanation for the relatively low percentage in test scores between Əndägäñ and Mäsmäs.

Critical Points and Open Questions

Although the present publication is an important contribution to the field of language documentation in Ethiopia, there are some essential points of criticism in the presentation of arguments and data as well as in data analysis, which I want to address in more detail.

Names and Status of Gurage Varieties

I feel uncomfortable with Ahland's (p. 1) initial statement "While much study has been done on the Gurage languages over the past one hundred years, one group, the Mesmes has escaped all but the most cursory attention." It is commonly known that the documentation of inadequately described languages, especially when they are endangered, has become a major field of research in descriptive linguistics since the 1990s. This is undeniably a very important task for any linguist but it should not yield a situation in which research on less endangered or better-known languages is frowned on. Besides, there is at least one other almost undocumented Gurage variety that disappeared recently, namely the Galila from Lake Wänči near Ambo, which probably is closely related to Kəstane (cf. Haberland 1960). Dobbi, another Gurage variety, is still spoken by a few thousand people but it is severely endangered as most of its speakers are bilingual with another Gurage variety and/or Amharic but not vice versa (cf. Meyer 2005). Nevertheless, Dobbi still lacks basic grammatical description. The same is true for the relatively small Gurage varieties of Gura and Enär or even for Geto with a more numerous speaker community. Finally, there are probably still Gurage varieties that are almost unknown to linguists, like Desa, which Ahland considers to be a dialect of Muḥər (p. 51).¹

The best-documented Gurage variety is undoubtedly Čaha for which various linguistic and cultural studies are available. This does not, however,

¹ Most Muḥər speakers are aware that their language consists of two major dialects commonly referred to by the form of the 1S independent personal pronoun as *anə bet* 'anə (= I) division' or as *edi bet* 'edi (= I) division'. As the form *edi* 'I' only occurs in Kəstane but in no other Ethiosemitic language, HETZRON (1977: 5) considers it to be part of Kəstane. Ahland (p. 51) mentions that he recorded a wordlist of the *edi bet*-variety from an individual belonging to the Desa ethnic division of the Muḥər. These data confirm that the *edi bet*-variety is indeed closer to Muḥər than to Kəstane. Consequently, Ahland introduced the new term "Desa" to refer to this variety. The term, however, is infelicitous because within the Desa ethnic division some people also speak *anə bet*. In addition, the *edi bet*-variety is also spoken by the people from Meqorqor who belong to the Bedlo division of the Muḥər. Therefore, I would prefer to stick to the more general terms *anə bet* and *edi bet*.

mean that the Čaha are the geographical and linguistic centre of the *Säbat bet* Gurage (p. 6). Geographically, the Čaha are located at the southwestern border of the *Säbat bet* Gurage (see Map 1.2, p. 5). Čaha as geographical centre makes only sense when the term “*Säbat bet* Gurage” does not denote a linguistic group but the ethnolinguistic confederation that Ahland describes in footnote 5 on p. 6. This confederation, however, would also include the Ənnämor, whose language belongs to another linguistic sub-group. Thus, it seems that Ahland applies the term “*Säbat bet* Gurage” to two distinct constructs, one including Ənnämor but the other excluding it. This might cause misunderstanding.

A major source of confusion in Gurage studies is the absence of clear criteria for distinguishing between a language and a dialect of a language (cf. Hetzron 1972: 1ff.) or even to define to which language a certain dialect actually belongs (cf. Hetzron 1977: 4ff.). Ahland intends to avoid this problem by using the term “lect” to account for linguistic convergence in the Gurage area (p. 18). However, this change in terminology does not bring about more clarity. Generally, it remains vague throughout the publication what has to be considered a language on its own or a sub-variety/dialect of a language. Initially, Ahland presents Muḥər, Aklil and Desa as well as Čaha, Gura and Gumär² as distinct languages (p. 1, footnote 1), but then Aklil and Desa are mentioned as dialects of Muḥər (p. 6, footnote 1 and for Desa also p. 51). On the other hand, Gura, Gumär and Čaha are always treated as separate languages although they are commonly considered dialects of Čaha (cf. Hetzron 1977: 4f., Völlmin 2009). In chapter two (Table 2.1 on p. 18), some previously mentioned *languages* turn into *lects* without a clear reason for this. For instance, Ahland considers Wolbareg to be distinct from Səlṭe (but see Gutt 1997 for a contrary position). Furthermore, Ahland mixes up genetic and typological classifications in Table 2.1 by considering Muḥər to be a Northern Gurage lect as opposed to Western Gurage lects (p. 18). The idea of Muḥər forming together with Kəstane and Dobbi the (genetic) group of Northern Gurage was suggested in Hetzron (1968) but later revised by putting Muḥər into another genetic sub-group (cf. Hetzron 1972: 119 and the discussion in Hetzron 1977: 22). The term “Northern Gurage” in a typological sense, however, was retained to refer to the structural similarities between Muḥər, Kəstane and Dobbi (cf. Hetzron 1977: 4). Surprisingly, Čaha is missing in Table 2.1 containing the lects in the Gurage convergence area that underwent contact-induced changes (p. 18). This might imply that Čaha

² For unclear reasons, Ahland uses the term “Gumera” instead of the more common term Gumär in the linguistic literature. The actual autoethnonym is pronounced [g^wamarə/gomarə] (VÖLLMIN 2009: 83).

either is not part of the Gurage convergence area, or that there is no contact-induced change observable. I think a more lucid way of expression would have been of great benefit for the reader.

The same is true for Ahland's non-uniform use of names denoting single languages or language groups. In Table 1.1 (p. 4), the term "Inor" is used as autoethnonym to refer to the Inor ethnolinguistic group, but in Map 1.2 (p. 2) and elsewhere it designates Ahland's linguistic group consisting of ʼĀnnāmōr, ʼĀndägāñ and Māsmās whereby the xenonym ʼĀnnāmōr is used to refer to the Inor ethnolinguistic group (p. 1, footnote 1 and elsewhere). Furthermore, Ahland uses Inor as a synonym for Hetzron's term "Peripheral Western Gurage" (p. 6). Another case, in which two names of a single linguistic group are mixed, concerns Kəstane/Soddo. Although Ahland mentions that Kəstane is the preferred self-designation of the group (footnote 4, p. 5), he mixes the terms Kəstane and Soddo in the appendices (e.g., pp. 98f., 117).

Organization, Reliability and Analysis of Data

A major shortcoming of the publication is in my view the organization of the Māsmās data. Although Ahland mentions the existence of data on the conjugation of two Māsmās verbs (p. 14), he did not include them in his publication. On the other hand, Bender's (1971) Māsmās wordlist occurs twice, once in appendix A, Comparison of Māsmās with PWG (p. 91), with added discussion of selected Māsmās entities and again in appendix B, Comparison of Māsmās with Hadiyya and Kambaata (p. 103). These wordlists are followed by the Māsmās text (pp. 110ff.) and additional discussion of certain lexemes and constructions. With regard to Bender and Stinson's³ unpublished grammatical notes, the list of Māsmās independent personal pronouns occurs in section 4.2 (pp. 48ff.) and in section 5.3 (p. 75); the Māsmās bound possessive pronouns are found in section 5.6 (pp. 80ff.). The repetition and dispersion of the data makes it very laborious to follow Ahland's argumentation. Furthermore, certain information about the data occurs repeatedly, e.g., the reader is informed that the use of the subscript corner in [m̥] denotes weak articulation the first time in footnote 17 on p. 60, then again in the text on p. 98, in footnote 1 on p. 125 and in footnote 2 on p. 133.

The data used for the establishment of the genetic affiliation of Māsmās originate from two different sources: (a) Bender's (1971) published Māsmās

³ AHLAND (2010: 13, 43) names as authors for the published Māsmās wordlist and the unpublished grammatical information Bender and Stinson but mentions only Bender as author in the List of References (p. 137), in the Acknowledgments (p. xi) and in the Introduction (p. 2). Although BENDER (1971: 284) acknowledges D. Lloyd Stinson as a source of information for Māsmās, his role in the collection and analysis of the data remains unclear.

wordlist and Bender and Stinson's unpublished grammatical notes collected in 1969, and (b) the Mäsmäs text recorded by Ahland in 2001 (p. 2). Unfortunately, Ahland does not specify which data of the terminal speaker he compared with Bender's wordlist (cf. p. 23). Therefore, Ahland's conclusion that there is no significant change between the speech of the terminal speaker and the speech of Bender's (1971) informant (p. 28) lacks the evidence on what it is based. When comparing Bender and Stinson's data from 1969 and 1971 with Ahland's text from 2001, I came across striking differences; some of them even mentioned by Ahland himself. Bender and Stinson report the existence of possessive prefixes in Mäsmäs (pp. 80f.) in their unpublished material from 1969, but only a possessive suffix occurs in the text (pp. 82f.). Almost all nominals in Bender's (1971) wordlist end in a final vowel but this vowel can be lacking in the text, as, for instance, *bi:de* 'house' (p. 51, Table 4.7) vs. *i-bi:d* 'in (the) house' (p. 111, Line 5), *hude* (p. 75, Table 5.1) vs. *hud* 'he, the' (p. 112, Line 10; p. 113, Line 13) or the vowels might differ, as in *a:we* (p. 93, Item 26) vs. *aβo* 'father' (p. 110, Line 1). The verb for 'say' is given as *-bejɔ:-* in the wordlist (p. 96, Item 68) but occurs as common Gunnän Gurage base *bar-* in the text (e.g., p. 110, Line 2). Similarly, the verb for 'go' is given as *hɔɔ:-* in the wordlist (p. 93, Item 32; p. 99) but it occurs as *wɛ:re* in the text.⁴

The influence of Amharic on Mäsmäs is puzzling and not well described. Although Ahland only identifies one item as a possible Amharic loanword in Bender's (1971) wordlist, the Mäsmäs text contains many more Amharic loanwords, like the discourse particle *ifi* 'okay' (p. 110, Line 1), *mengist* 'government' (Line 16, p. 131), *nore* 'live' (Line 20, p. 134), *nebbɛr* as past tense auxiliary verb (p. 116)⁵ or *gebbɛr* 'pay tax' (Line 14 p. 130) and *gebbɛrinmitɛ* 'farming' (Line 17 p. 132). The loanword status of *nebbɛr* and *gebbɛr* is evidenced by the geminated *bb* which should be pronounced *pp* in Mäsmäs (cf. p. 55).⁶ The full verb *nebbɛrɛ* 'be, reside, live' (in *Säbat bet* Gurage varieties as well as Kəstane, Mäsqän and Dobbi) with its cognates *neppɛrɛ* (Əndägäñ) and *neperɛ* (Inor, Geto and Čaha) occurs in all Gurage varieties (cf. Leslau 1979b: 448) so

⁴ The verb *wɛ(:)rɛ* is commonly attested in PWG. Ahland's assumption that Bender's verb *hɔɔ:-* 'go' might be related to Amharic *hedɛ* 'go' (p. 99) is far fetched. The two words for 'go', *hɔɔ:-* and *wɛ:re*, seem to be cognate with the root **hɔɔr* 'go', which occurs as *hore* in Tigrinya and Gafat [and Gəʕəz] but as *were* in PWG. In Əndägäñ, the closest relative to Mäsmäs, the jussive base of this verb still starts with an initial fricative, i.e., *jɛ-xʷɛr* 'he may go' (LES LAU 1979b: 660).

⁵ Ahland calls this auxiliary verb "existential". The existential verb in Amharic is *alle* 'exist' while the verb *nebbɛrɛ*, in contrast, functions as past-tense auxiliary verb.

⁶ Beside gemination of the second root consonant, the vowel *e* (and/or palatalization of the preceding consonant) is a typical sign for conjugation type B which is the preferred conjugation with loan-verbs in many South-Ethiosemitic languages. Interestingly, this vowel is lacking with the past-tense auxiliary verb *nebbɛr*.

that the Mäsmäs past-tense auxiliary *nebb̥er* could also be a loanword from another Gurage variety, even if Ahland (p. 35) considers this to be implausible. Ahland insists that the terminal speaker does not speak Amharic but only has a passive knowledge of it (p. 35). This is quite remarkable because he also incorporated a borrowed grammatical element from Amharic in the text, the past-tense auxiliary verb *nebb̥er*. According to Thomason – Kaufman (1988: 74f.), borrowing of grammatical elements usually presupposes intense contact between the speakers of two languages, in this case Amharic and Mäsmäs, which, however, seems not to have occurred in the final stages of Mäsmäs (cf. Ahland: 21ff.). Ahland mentions that the terminal speaker also uses the native PWG past-tense auxiliary verb *ban̥e* in addition to Amharic *nebb̥er* (p. 116, Comment 2).⁷ The auxiliary *ban̥e* is exclusively a main-clause verb. When the past-tense auxiliary verb has to be used in subordination, the (full) verb *nebb̥er* ‘be, reside, live’ (or one of its cognates *nep(p)er*) occurs instead. Thus, there is a semantic relationship between the two verbs, *ban̥e* and *nebb̥er*, so that the use of *nebb̥er* in Mäsmäs main-verb clauses might be a process of hypercorrection or of reducing grammatical irregularities. Nevertheless, the voiced geminated plosive *bb̥* in the Mäsmäs verb *nebb̥er* still suggests considering it a loanword. However, it need not be a loanword from Amharic. In the Mäsmäs text, Ahland considers words, like *k’eb̥ber* ‘plant’ or *aggele* ‘raise cattle’ (p. 113, Line 13, and p. 121 and 129), loanwords because they lack the expected sound changes from *k’ > ?* and *bb̥ > pp*, and contain the lateral sound *l*, which is extremely rare in Western Gurage varieties. These words cannot be borrowed from Western Gurage varieties as they also participated partially in these sound changes. Nor can Amharic be the source language because it uses other lexemes for denoting these verbal semantics. Based on the phonological and semantic restrictions, only languages like Kəstane or Muḥər might be possible source languages. Thus, it remains unclear where these verbs are actually taken from. Amharic is often the first candidate for a contact language but other languages or language-internal change might also be involved.

Another major reservation I have is concerned with Ahland’s assumption that Bender’s (1971) Mäsmäs data can serve as a base for establishing the authenticity of the Mäsmäs text. Sasse (1973) meticulously demonstrates that Bender’s (1971) wordlists for some Cushitic languages are full of tran-

⁷ The verb *ban̥e* occurs in different representations, namely followed by the suffix *-d*, as in *ban̥ed* (p. 122, Line 1), or without this suffix in the phonologically reduced forms *ban* (Line 13) and *ba* (Line 6). While the alternation between *ban(n)̥e ~ ba* is common in many Gunnän Gurage varieties, as mentioned by Ahland (p. 122), the form *ban* seems to be peculiar to Mäsmäs. Note that the suffix *-d* attached to the past-tense auxiliary is not a main verb marker as it occurs in the Northern Gurage varieties Kəstane, Dobbi and Muḥər, it is rather a reflex of the so-called *k/t/d* suffix in PWG (HETZRON 1977: 88ff.).

scription errors and misunderstandings. Therefore, I wonder about the reliability of the Mäsmäs data in Bender's (1971) wordlist. I would not exclude the possibility that the major reason for differences between the Mäsmäs data in Bender (1971) and Ahland are inaccuracies in Bender's data instead of language change processes. With regard to Bender's (1971) recorded Mäsmäs verbs, I cannot see any regularity for the occurrence of specific vowels in verbs. The verb *nakəs-e* 'bite' (p. 92, Item 7), for instance, commonly occurs as *nε(k)kεs-ε* in Ethiosemitic languages, whereby the final *-ε* refers to a 3SM subject with perfective verbs. The final *-e* in *nakəs-e* is ridiculous. It might originate in the merger of the 3SM subject suffix *-ε* with an object suffix *-i* referring to a 1S or 3SM object. The vowel *ɔ* might be a reflex of internal labialization as occurs in the impersonal, which would speak in favour of a 3SM object suffix, which is frequently attached to impersonal verbs. The vowel *a* instead of *ε* in the first syllable of *nakəs-e* could be Hadiyya influenced, but in other verbs Bender transcribes the vowel *ε*, as in the verb *setf'ɔ* 'drink' (p. 93, Item 19). This verb, in turn, ends in an enigmatic vowel *ɔ*, as many other verbs in the list, like *mɔtɔ* 'die' (p. 93, Item 17), *hamɔ* 'give' (p. 93, Item 31), *ɔ:tɔɔ* 'kill' (p. 94, Item 42) or *ba'mɔ:* 'eat' (p. 93, Item 22), which even ends in a long vowel. However, a few verbs lack the final vowel *ɔ*, like *sɔ'ma* 'hear' (p. 94, Item 38). Is the final vowel *ɔ* possibly a residue of the so-called main verb markers (cf. Hetzron 1977: 88ff.)? The fact that Bender (1971) adds a hyphen to most verbs ending in the vowel *ɔ*, like *-beɲɔ:-* 'say' (p. 96, Item 68), *-ha:ɲɔ:-* 'see' (p. 96, Item 69), *hɔɔɔ:-* 'go' (p. 93, Item 32) or *harɔ:-* 'know' (p. 94, Item 43), indicates that they are followed by other morphemes and can, therefore, not end in the main verb marker. In short, the morphological interpretation of the phonetic realization of these verbs remains unclear. Ahland's (p. 69) suggestion that vowel harmony plays a role in vowel rounding is not convincing because it does not explain the trigger of this process despite that vowel harmony does not occur in Ahland's text data. The general pattern of the verbs in Bender's list is substantially different from the verbs in the perfective aspect recorded by Ahland. The lax vowels *ɔ* and *ɔ:* and to a lesser extent also the vowels *ʊ* and *u:* are quite frequent in Bender's (1971) wordlist but relatively rare in Ahland's text from 2001 in which they exclusively appear as short vowels. Therefore, the conclusion that *ɔ* and *o* as well as *ʊ* and *u* are four different phonemes in Mäsmäs (p. 116) seems to be rash. Ahland himself has some doubts regarding the reliability of the minimal pair *k'ok'o* 'many' vs. *k'ək'ɔ* 'big' in Bender's data (p. 48 footnote 7). In another explanation, Ahland (pp. 68f.) assumes that laxing of vowels in Mäsmäs results from an ongoing, externally induced sound change due to Hadiyya influence. The underlying Mäsmäs vowels *ε*, *o* and *i*, *u* should be neutral-

ized to ɔ and ʊ, respectively, in closed syllables. This sound change is only partly valid for the data in Bender's (1971) wordlist; there is no evidence for such a change in the text data. If laxing of vowels were really a sound change in progress, I would expect that the speech of the terminal speaker, who even spoke Hadiyya as dominant language, would exhibit numerous instances of laxed vowels. However, only three tokens of each of the vowels ɔ and ʊ were recorded. The vowel ɔ occurs in *-wɔʔr* 'guarding cattle (IPV)'⁸ (p. 110, Lines 1, 2), *ʃwɔd/-ʃwɔd* 'plow (PV/ IPV)' (pp. 110ff., Lines 3, 6, 15, 17) and *-sɔ.ʔir* 'begging (IPV)' (p. 112, Line 10); the vowel ʊ in *-iggʊd* 'after' (pp. 110ff., Lines 3, 9, 14, 19), *hʊd* 'he' (pp. 112f., Lines 10, 12 13) and *-ʔʊf* 'being satisfied (IPV)' (p. 113, Line 13). For the latter two items, cognates in other Gurage varieties have a labialized consonant which might trigger vowel laxing, as even indicated by Ahland (p. 129) for *-ʔʊf*; *hʊd* 'he' is related to *h wɪt* (see Hetzron 1977: 58). Thus, except in *-sɔ.ʔir* 'begging (IPV)' and in *-iggʊd* 'after', the laxed vowels occur immediately after the labial approximant *w* or in the environment of a labialized consonant. However, labials or labialized consonants do not trigger vowel laxing in other Mäsmäs examples, like *wɛd* 'place' (p. 110 Line 4) or *wɪr* 'ox' (p. 112 Line 9). In contrast to Ahland's assumed sound change (pp. 68f.), laxing of vowels does not apply regularly in closed syllables, as can be seen from the two examples just mentioned or from *konn.t'om* 'Hadiyya' (p. 111 Line 5), *huk.ko* 'like this' (p. 113 Line 14), etc. The laxed vowel ɔ even occurs in an open syllable in *-sɔ.ʔir* 'begging (IPV)' but the tensed vowel *ɛ* in a closed syllable in *-sɛʔr-i* 'in order to beg' (p. 112 Line 11). Based on these data, I would assume that a 3SM object suffix was attached to the verb *-sɔ.ʔir* or that this verb is in the impersonal. Both grammatical constructions are characterized by labialization which can spread into the verb and trigger the labialization of non-coronal consonants (see Hetzron 1977: 45ff. for a general overview and Leslau 1992 for Ēndägāñ as the closest relative of Mäsmäs). As mentioned by Ahland (p. 69), labialization also affects the pronunciation of vowels, typically yielding *ɛ > ɔ*, *a > o* and *i > u*. As the glottal stop ʔ belongs to the labializable consonants, the vowel ɔ in *-sɔ.ʔir* 'begging (IPV)' may have its origin in the underlying sequence *-sɛʔwr* coming from *-sɛʔr*+LABIALIZATION (beg.IPV+it/him) '(he) begging him' or (beg.IPV+IP) 'one begging'. This assumption perfectly explains the variation of ɔ and *ɛ* in the above verbs. However, it does not explain the occurrence of ɔ in the verb *-wɔʔr* 'guarding cattle

⁸ Note that the exact meaning of the perfective verb *waʔar-ɛ* (which is *-wɔʔr* in the imperfective aspect) is 'spend the day', while the verbal compound *areʔ waʔar-ɛ* stands for 'guard cattle (lit. spend the day (with) cattle)' in Ēndägāñ and Ēnnämor (cf. LESLAU 1979a: 290f.; 1979b: 640 for the data).

(IPV)'. This verb cannot be in the impersonal because the subject is known and the vowel *ɔ* cannot be a reflex of the 3SM object pronominal suffix as the construction 'guarding cattle' does not refer to its inherent object 'cattle' by object suffixes. Thus, probably different phonological processes might cause laxing of the vowel *ɛ*. In conclusion, I do not consider Ahland's vowel laxing rule due to Hadiyya influence (pp. 68ff.) to be a plausible explanation. First, this rule is not in accordance with Ahland's text data. Second, with regard to Hadiyya, vowel laxing in closed syllables occurs fairly frequently with the vowels *a* and *i* but only rarely with other vowels (cf. Hudson 1976: 249). Contrarily in Mäsmäs, precisely the vowels *a* and *i* do not undergo vowel laxing; it only occurs with the vowels *ɛ*, *o* and *ɪ*, *u*. Furthermore, the laxed vowels *ɔ* and *ʊ* are very rare in Bender's (1971) Hadiyya and Kambaata wordlists, which might indicate that even in these languages it is a marginal phonological process. Third, the statement that the vowels *ɔ* and *ʊ* do not occur in other Ethiosemitic languages (p. 68) and must, therefore, be a contact phenomenon in Mäsmäs, is simply wrong, as Bender's (1971: 232ff.) wordlists for Argobba, Harari, Kəstane, Zay, etc. reveal (see also Leslau 1979b: xvii, Hetzron 1977: 34f. for a general overview and Goldenberg 1968: 66ff. for a detailed description of the vowel sounds in Kəstane).

What is noticeably absent from the presentation of the Mäsmäs data are in-depth discussions of phonetic data peculiar to Mäsmäs (and to a few other Gunnän Gurage varieties), like the occurrence of clusters with three consonants, e.g., *konnt'om* 'Hadiyya' (p. 111, Line 5) or *bawnst* 'by five' (p. 114, Lines 19, 20), or the existence of the geminated glottal stop, as in *zɛʔmɛhu* '(I) having sowed' (p. 111, Line 6).

Ahland (p. 80ff.) also hypothesizes about a syntactic change in Mäsmäs due to Hadiyya contact. In Bender and Stinson's unpublished material, the Mäsmäs possessive pronouns are prefixed (or pro-cliticized) to the possessed noun, as in *bī(ne)-bi:de* (1SPO-house) 'my house' (p. 81). Prefixed possessive pronouns are not frequent in Ethiosemitic languages but occur in Hadiyya, the proposed contact language (Hudson 1976: 258f.). Consequently, Ahland concludes that Mäsmäs speakers adapted their speech to the Hadiyya pattern. Neglecting the discussion on prefixation or pro-cliticization of these pronouns, Ahland himself remarks that his text data do not contain any of these prefixed possessive pronouns but only the first person singular possessive suffix *-n* (*~na~no*), as in *aβo-n* (father-1SPO) 'my father' (p. 110, Line 1). Bender and Stinson's possessive prefixes are very similar to the independent personal pronouns (cf. p. 49f.). The only difference between the two paradigms is an initial fricative *h-* in the possessive prefixes of the second person and the first person plural. According to Ahland (p. 82), the possessive prefix-

es do not consist of the genitive marker plus independent personal pronoun because the genitive marker is the prefix *ε*-, not *h*-, in Mäsmäs. Ahland, therefore, assumes that Bender and Stinson's consultant was more influenced by Hadiyya than his terminal speaker. This conclusion is not convincing given the fact that the terminal speaker had been using Hadiyya almost exclusively over the last thirty years. Possibly Mäsmäs has simply two different paradigms of possessive pronouns. One paradigm is formed from independent pronouns that precede their head, but the other paradigm consists of suffixes not related to the independent personal pronouns. In most Ethiosemitic languages, two paradigms of possessive pronouns co-occur and fulfill different pragmatic functions. The use of different forms of personal pronouns in subject/object function or when functioning as genitive modifier, occurs, for instance, in Argobba (cf. Wetter 2010: 248ff.). Thus, the prefixed possessive pronouns in Mäsmäs need not be result of contact-induced language change with Hadiyya.

Another doubtful contact-induced phenomenon is proposed for the pronominal system (p. 75f.). Mäsmäs pronouns are said to distinguish between masculine and feminine gender in the singular of the second and third person but not in the plural due to Hadiyya influence. North Ethiosemitic languages as well as Gunnän Gurage varieties also distinguish between masculine and feminine gender in the second and third person plural. However, a gender distinction in the singular but not in the plural in the pronominal system is a characteristic genetic feature of the Transversal South Ethiosemitic languages (i.e., Amharic, Argobba, Harari and East Gurage varieties) and also occurs in the extinct Gafat (Hetzron 1972: 37). Mäsmäs exactly adopted this system of Transversal South Ethiosemitic and Gafat, but not the Hadiyya one which only distinguishes gender in the third person singular but not in the second person.

Questions Regarding the Method and Data Used for Genetic Classification

Ahland's approach to the genetic classification of Mäsmäs and related Gurage varieties is not always straightforward. In order to establish the membership of Mäsmäs within the PWG group, he lists 6 morphological features (p. 46): (1) the causative morpheme *a*-, (2) the passive-reflexive morpheme *t*-, (3) the negative marker *an*-, (4) the temporal conjunction *t*-, (5) the purposive marker *-i*, and (6) the prefix *ε*- as marker of affirmative perfective verbs in relative clauses. Features (1) and (2) are common in all Ethiosemitic languages, while features (3) and (4) are common in all varieties of *Säbat bet* Gurage. Only features (5) and (6) are specific to PWG languages, as Ahland himself mentions (p. 45). So there is actually no need to mention features (1) to (4). The list of lexical entries that should contain only words unique to Mäsmäs and PWG (p. 47)

contains two entries which clearly have a wider distribution within *Säbat bet* Gurage. The Mäsmäs term *de:ŋga* ‘children’ has the cognates *dengiɛ* in Muḥər, *dengʼa* in Əža, Dobbi and Mäsqaṇ, and *de:nga* in Əndägäñ (cf. Leslau 1979b: 213).⁹ Furthermore, Ahland’s (p. 47f.) proposed verbal root *i:m* ‘give’ in Mäsmäs and its assumed cognate *i:m* in Proto-Omoti is unsound considering the evidence from other Gurage varieties (see also Ahland’s discussion on p. 125). The verb ‘give’ in Mäsmäs and other Gunnän Gurage varieties is an irregular verb which originates from the root **√whb*. The perfective base of this verb usually starts with the vowel *a* (cf. Leslau 1979b: 641) but becomes *i* (less frequent also *e* or *ə*) in the imperfective base (cf. Hetzron 1977: 75f.). Furthermore, the final plosive *b* of some lexical entities can change into the labial nasal *m* in PWG varieties (Leslau 1979b: 41). For Mäsmäs, Bender (1971) recorded the perfective base *hamɔ-* (p. 93, Item 31), which starts with a fricative followed by the vowel *a*. In the imperfective base, *i:m* (p. 112, Line 12), the vowel *i* occurs instead. Thus, the Mäsmäs verb *hamɔ-/i:m* ‘give (PV/IPV)’ is clearly cognate with the common Semitic root **√whb*. The similarity between Proto-Omoti and Mäsmäs *i:m* is a coincidence rather than a cognate.

Ahland (p. 53f.) considers the change from the voiced geminate plosives **dd/*bb* to their unvoiced counterparts *t(t)/p(p)* as a unique feature of PWG. However, this sound change also occurs in Čaha, a CWG variety. Even if Ahland is aware of this fact (p. 55), he does not discuss it in his sequencing of sound changes used as historical evidence for his classification of Gurage varieties (pp. 86f.).

Ahland’s argumentation regarding the result of the intelligibility test and the phonological reconstruction also lacks consistency. In the first chapter, Ahland prefers to rely on the result of his intelligibility test for the postulation of communication centres in Gurage (p. 5) yielding four independent groupings of Gurage varieties. In the conclusion (pp. 85ff.), however, Ahland favours the results of his phonological reconstruction over the results of the intelligibility test for postulating the sub-division within the PWG group. The main reason for doing so is that the intelligibility testing in Chapter 1 would have yielded another sub-classification because the intelligibility scores between any of the Inor varieties are higher than between Mäsmäs and Əndägäñ (p. 87, footnote 2).

The position of Geto in Ahland’s classification is inconclusive. In the Introduction, Ahland considers it to be part of *Säbat bet* Gurage (pp. 5f.) but in

⁹ Note that the velar nasal in Ahland’s transcription *de:ŋga* ‘children’ (p. 47) of HETZRON’s (1977: 244) Ənnämor term *deengʼa* is not correct. The palatalized velar /*gʼ*/ is pronounced as palatal plosive [j]. Consequently, the preceding nasal is a palatal not a velar, i.e., it should be *de:ɲa*.

the conclusion Geto has become part of PWG (pp. 87ff.). It remains unclear why Geto takes these two different positions and which is the intended one.

Furthermore, it remains unexplained why the intelligibility scores in Čaha, Muḥər, Ənnāmor and Əndägāñ among mother tongue speakers are less than the scores of the same speakers in another Gurage variety not spoken as mother tongue (p. 4). Čaha mother tongue speakers, for instance, received a score of 90 when tested in Čaha but a score of 92 when tested in Mäsqañ. Were the test subjects in these languages really mother tongue speakers of the respective languages without a second language background in another Gurage variety? Or did these scores occur due to mistakes in the test administration?

Questions to the Analysis of the Mäsmäs Text

The interlinear morpheme glossing system used in the presentation of the Mäsmäs text data (pp. 110ff.) is not in accordance with good practice in linguistics. Despite the lack of consistent right alignment of language example and linguistic gloss, the information provided in the glosses is often inappropriate. This problem is further augmented through the lack of a list of abbreviations so that the interpretation of glosses like SFX (probably meaning ‘suffix’) is up to the reader. The same applies to the occurrence of the tilde on top of the consonants *n* and *z*, as in *tĩ-ñ-žĩñĩx* ‘when we (were) speaking’ (p. 111, Lines 5, 6), whose function remains totally unclear as the palatal nasal is elsewhere transcribed in accordance with the convention of the IPA as *ɲ*. The idiomatic expression in Line 5 (p. 111) is glossed according to the literal meaning instead of indicating the actual meaning of the involved morphemes so that the interpretation of the morphemes involved remains unclear.

Verbs generally lack information on aspect/mood and are glossed with either English present tense verbs or past tense verbs without a clear reason for this variation. This yields a situation in which the imperfective verb in the construction *ε-wɔʔr bane-d* (3SM-guard.cattle EXIST.PAST-MVM) ‘(he) was taking care of cattle’ (p. 110, Line 1) is glossed the same way as its perfective counterpart *waʔar-ehu* (guard.cattle-1S.CONV) ‘(I) took care of cattle’ (p. 113, Line 15).¹⁰ Furthermore, every occurrence of the multifunctional suffix *-m*¹¹ is glossed “MAIN.PAST”, which I would interpret as ‘past-tense

¹⁰ One type of converbs in Gunnän Gurage is formed by attaching the suffix *-m* (or its allomorphs) to an inflected verb in the imperfective or perfective aspect (cf. HETZRON 1977: 94ff.).

¹¹ The suffix *-m* generally functions as contrastive focus marker in Ethiosemitic languages (see GIRMA A. DEMEKE – MEYER 2008 for its analysis in Amharic which, according to my experience, can also be extended to other South Ethiosemitic lan-

marker in main-verb clauses'. This gloss even once precedes the present tense copula (p. 111, Line 8) although the combination of present tense and past tense in the same clause makes absolutely no sense for me.

Several glosses are used for the same morpheme, like the prefix *ε*- which functions as either 3SM or 1S subject prefix (p. 110, Lines 1, 2) but on p. 112 (Line 10) it is only glossed as 3M without apparent reason. On the other hand, the same gloss is given to several morphemes (or allomorphs?), such as 1SPO as gloss for *-n* (Lines 1, 2, 4, 14), *-iɲa* (Lines 2, 5, 8, 19), *-no* (Lines 7, 9) and *-jome* (Line 4). The morpheme *-jome* is probably wrongly glossed or belongs to another set of possessive suffixes. The suffix *-ε'hu* is glossed as 1S.MAIN.PAST in Line 4 but as 1S.CONV elsewhere (e.g., Line 6); in Line 7 the suffix *-εhu* (without stress) is glossed as 1S although the verb itself is a main-clause verb. Ahland's glossing raises more questions than that it helps to interpret the data: is stress important for marking main-clause verbs or converbs or for both – or does it not play any role at all?

Furthermore, the 1S subject suffix occurs in two different forms, namely *-εhu* (Lines 4, 6, 15, 17) and less frequent *-hu* (Lines 6, 14) when following a consonant. As the subject suffixes in Əndägäñ (see Leslau 1992: 467), but neither in Ənnämör (see Berhanu Chamora – Hetzron 2000: 45) nor in other Gurage varieties, start with the vowel *ε*, the form of the pronominal suffix appears to be a strong indicator for the close relationship between Mäsmäs and Əndägäñ. In addition, as the 1S subject suffix *-hu* is usually (but not exclusively) found in loanwords, it might represent a loan construction from another Gurage variety or even Amharic.

A related problem concerns the translation of the subject prefix *n*- (Lines 5, 6 and 16). This prefix is glossed as 1P and occurs at least once in Line 5 in the English translation as 'we'. However, the Amharic version is translated with the 1S subject 'I' in Lines 5 and 6 but with the 1P subject 'we' in Line 5. It is impossible for the reader to resolve this contradiction. The correct translation of this prefix contains very important information. Usually, 1P subjects on imperfective verbs are referred to by the circumfix *n...nε* in Gurage varieties; the only exception is Kəstane in which only the prefix *n*- marks 1P subjects (Hetzron 1977: 80). Based on this grammatical feature (in connection with the previously discussed loanwords), there might indeed be a closer linguistic relationship between Kəstane and Mäsmäs, which was actually neglected by Ahland (p. 35).¹² Unfortunately,

guages, but see also HETZRON 1977: 128f. for an alternative analysis). In addition, the suffix *-m* also functions as marker of converbs and a number of main-clause verbs in certain Gunnän Gurage varieties (HETZRON 1977: 84 and 94ff.).

¹² Note that Amharic also marks 1P subjects on imperfective verbs with the prefix *n*-.

Ahland does not deal with this kind of variation in verb conjugation nor does he provide Bender and Stinson's material on verb conjugation, which would have been of help for the correct interpretation of the text data.

Ahland documents two morphemes for the verb 'be' in his text: *bi-ho:no-iw-ed* (when-be-1S-SFX) 'when I was' [?] (pp. 111, 119f.; Line 5) vs. *ε-hener* (1S-be) translated as 'I lived' (pp. 113, 130; Lines 15, 16). It is not clear whether *ho:no* and *hener* are allomorphs of the same morpheme or different morphemes. Ahland (pp. 119f.) is of the opinion that *ho:no* is the copula in Mäsmäs and cognate with Ḥnāmōr *xēr(-ε)* and Ḥndägāñ *hε:n(-ε)*¹³ referring to Leslau (1979). Some pages later, however, Ahland (pp. 130f.) states that the copula in Mäsmäs is essentially the same as the copula in Ḥnāmōr which is now given as *hē:ĩ-* with reference to Hetzron (1977). Ahland argues that the nasalized vowel changed into the nasal consonant in the Mäsmäs form, thus *hener*. He explains the round vowels in Mäsmäs *ho:no* through a process of vowel rounding triggered by the approximant *-w* functioning as 1S subject suffix. Such a process is known from Ḥndägāñ, in which the 3PM subject suffix *-um* with perfective verbs and the masculine plural marker *-uwe* with imperfective verbs trigger rounding of the vowels in the verb base (cf. Leslau 1992: 467ff.). Ahland's analysis of the Mäsmäs data is doubtful for several reasons. The Mäsmäs verb is said to agree with a 1s subject marked by the suffix *-w*¹⁴ but not with a 3pm subject as was the case in Ḥndägāñ. Rounding of vowels or labialization of root consonants in verbs is ascribed to an old Semitic third person plural suffix *-u:* (see Hetzron 1977: 81ff. for further details), i.e., labialization is morphophonologically conditioned and does not occur with any labial element. The analysis of the suffix *-w* as marker of a 1S subject is problematic because elsewhere the suffix *-(ε)hu* occurs in this function with perfective verbs (e.g., p. 111 Lines 6, 7). Furthermore, the analysis of the verbal expression *bi-ho:no-iw-ed* as consisting of a verb in the perfective aspect (or as Ahland calls it 'past tense') is problematic because the conjunction *b-* is followed by the vowel *i*, not *ε*, which I would expect to occur with perfective verbs. Given the Amharic translation of *ti-kēff-e* (when-send-1SOBJ) 'when he sent me' (p. 110, Line 2), I would expect the vowel of the conjunction *bi-* to refer to a 3SM or 3P subject (both are marked by the same prefix) with an imperfective verb. The quality of the prefix vowel seems to vary between *i* and *ε*; the latter is found, for instance, in *ti-i-da:r-uwε-tu* (when-3M-blessed-3MPL-SFX) 'once they

¹³ The final vowel *-ε* is not part of the copula but the 3SM subject suffix.

¹⁴ I guess that the form of the suffix is rather *-w*, but not *iw*, as probably incorrectly transcribed by Ahland (p. 111), because the combination of the vowels *o* plus *i* into a diphthong *oi* is strange for an Ethiosemitic language.

were blessed' (p. 112, Line 12), in which the suffix *-uwe* as part of the subject marker indicates masculine plural. In analogy, the suffix *-w* or *-we* attached to the aforementioned verb 'be' might also be part of the subject marker, thus *b-iho:n-owε-(ε)d* (when-3P-be-3MPL-SFX) 'when they are', with the masculine plural suffix *-owε* as trigger for vowel rounding. This analysis, however, is not confirmed by Ahland's data because vowel rounding does not occur in the verb *ti-i-da:r-uwe-tu* 'once they were blessed' which would also contain the masculine plural suffix. The verb *ho:no* might, therefore, be in the impersonal which could explain the labialization. However, the labialization does not account for the deletion of the final *r*, as it occurs in the second form *henεr* 'be'. I think the simplest explanation for the occurrence of the Mäsmäs verb *ho:no* is that it is a loanword from Amharic *hon-ε* 'be(come)' which, then, should be added to Ahland's list of Amharic loanwords.

Formalities

A few typos occur in Bender's (1971) reproduced Mäsmäs wordlist, namely, the lack of vowel length in *ha^wɔnɔde* 'night' (p. 106, Item 58), *k'ine* 'root' (p. 106, Item 66) and *an'nɔda* 'tongue' (p. 108, Item 87) for actual *ha^wɔnɔ:de*, *k'i:ne* and *annɔ:da*; the lack of gemination in *mun* 'what' (p. 108, Item 95) for actual *mun(n)-e*; and the misprints in *zur(i)ji* 'seed' (p. 107, Item 70) and *-f'ɔna:-* 'sit' (p. 107, Item 71) for actual *zur(i)je* and *-f'ɔna:-*. In the text data, the word *iw* 'honey' (p. 112, Line 11) should probably be written *wi*.

In addition, there are a few formal errors in the references. The citations "Leslau (1992)" (p. 69) and "Sasse (1992)" (p. 90) are ambiguous because the references contain four different entries for Leslau in 1992 (p. 140) and two different entities for Sasse in 1992 (p. 141). The citation "Leslau [p. 468]" (p. 127) lacks the year. Rose (2003) (p. 141) contains reference to a paper held at a conference that was published in 2006¹⁵ and the reference provided for Gutt (1977) (p. 139) is incorrect.¹⁶

Evaluation

Despite the critical points, the book is arguably the most comprehensive description of a language death process of an Ethiopian language. The most valuable benefit of the present publication is the preservation of the inadequately documented language Mäsmäs from total extinction. Through combining linguistic, sociolinguistic and historical data, Ahland accounts for the reasons of its death and the language change phenomena preceding it. The

¹⁵ ROSE 2005: 843–850.

¹⁶ It should be: GUTT 1980: 57–84.

sociolinguistic interview with the terminal speaker and the brief outline of the narrated origins of the Mäsmäs people provide interesting background information about possible episodes in the language death process. Ahland's detailed discussion and neat summary of peculiar sound changes in Mäsmäs and Gunnän Gurage varieties, like the devoicing of geminate plosives, various degrees of fusion regarding the sonorants *n*, *l*, *r*, consonant lenition, etc., are a very welcome contribution to the comparative study of Gurage varieties. In addition, Ahland's intelligibility test among selected Gunnän Gurage varieties discovers the extent to which speakers of closely related varieties are able to communicate with each other. This was hitherto only a rudimentarily researched field.

List of Abbreviations

1	First person	M	Masculine	PO	Possessive pronoun
3	Third person	MVM	Main verb marker	PV	Perfective aspect
CONV	Converb	OBJ	Object suffix	PWG	Peripheral Western
CWG	Central Western Gurage	P	Plural		Gurage
IP	Impersonal	PAST	Past tense	S	Singular
IPV	Imperfective aspect	PL	Plural	SFX	Suffix

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Ronny Meyer

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